

## Mercury News editorial:

# San Jose's disability tweak will help but is probably not enough

*Mercury News Editorial*

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The San Jose City Council is expected to take a positive step Tuesday toward reassuring police recruits that they'll be taken care of if they're injured on the job.

But an ordinance clarifying the disability reforms in Measure B won't solve the problem of recruiting and retaining good candidates -- for public safety or for other departments.

From city planning to the water treatment plant to the city attorney's office, professionals have been bailing and are difficult to replace at a level of similar expertise. The latest loss is Assistant Planning Director Laurel Prevetti, who will take to Los Gatos not only her depth of knowledge but also decades of irreplaceable institutional memory.



September 2006: A hearing of the San Jose Police/Fire Retirement Board. (Mercury News)

As to major department head openings, it's now impossible to attract top tier applicants from outside the city.

Councilman Don Rocha is calling the question of San Jose's ability to attract and retain talent. His specific policy proposals would unravel too much of the Measure B reforms, but he's right about the need to address the broader picture -- including the possibility that another ballot measure may be needed to tweak some provisions of B.

We hope Tuesday's discussion goes beyond the disability ordinance, if only to make it clear that this council understands the broader nature of the challenge.

Of course compensation is largely a matter of union negotiation. Discussing it in public is challenging. Then there's the inconvenient fact that the city's budget still runs a small deficit, invoking the no-easy-solutions rule.

Having five council members running for mayor complicates matters. They have plans and proposals for various aspects of the problem, but the cumulative impression often left from political events -- including statements by some candidates for city council -- is that the current council doesn't understand the magnitude of the problem.

So we would like to see a fuller discussion with all council members' elected representative hats in place -- and with the ability to establish facts with objective observers in the room.

For example, the disability provision of Measure B was sloppily written, a costly mistake in retrospect. But changes were necessary: A 2011 audit showed San Jose's rates of police and fire disability retirement hugely higher than comparable cities', costing city taxpayers as much as \$51 million a year.

Another example: Council candidates often say it was a mistake to ask the police to take a 10 percent pay cut in 2011. But the union accepted the same cut as other city unions to avoid more layoffs of officers at the time.

Still, any question of this council's understanding of today's staffing problem is not helping anyone. Nor does the short memory of critics as to why Measure B was conceived in the first place. We hope Tuesday's debate is illuminating.